

Cultivating Effective Board Leadership

By Leadership Outfitters, Inc.

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Organizational leaders always seem to be in a meeting or going to one! One board member from an International non-profit has said that perhaps, judging from the amount of time spent in meetings, that the organization's theme should be "we meet".

The challenges of running an effective meeting (e.g. communication, conflict, and decision making) can be linked directly to whether the organization shares a common vision. A collective vision is paramount to so many aspects of our professional and personal lives, but we seldom take the time to establish that common vision with our boards. While we may never have one hundred percent agreement, consensus on where the organization is headed will reduce the level of tension in a meeting.

It is no secret that there are board members with special interests. That is why they get involved with the community—good or bad. We all do that in our own respective ways. It's why we go to a favorite restaurant or volunteer for a certain organization. There is a commodity that the restaurant or organization possesses and we are willing to give our resources in exchange for what they can offer.

In a study by authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, they set out to discover what it took to become an effective leader. They wanted to know the common practices of ordinary men and women when they were at their leadership best—when they were able to take people or organizations to new levels. After nearly 10 years of research and thousands of surveys of non-profits, corporations and government agencies, their data revealed *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*.

Kouzes and Posner's study resulted in writing [The Leadership Challenge](#) which gives leaders five practices that were found to be important. One of those practices is "Inspire a Shared Vision". A shared vision is important to leadership because it creates an environment within which folks pull together to work toward that vision. An inspired team is an enthusiastic team.

How do you explore direction in your organization? An idea to consider is if your community has several meetings a year, consider using one of those meetings to focus on where the organization is going. Ask your members, what will our organization look like, feel like, and be like five years from now? Encourage them to describe the organization or tell a story. Then the group can focus on what the organization must do to achieve that vision. The group can then look at priorities and go on to build goals based on the priorities.

Once the values have been defined by the group, then the critical resource of time can be better managed in certain key directions. Continue to review the vision and priorities throughout the year and as new ideas or suggestions emerge you can evaluate them

based on the shared vision of the group. And, as the board makes progress toward the vision don't forget to celebrate along the way.

The Leadership Challenge by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner is available from Jossey Bass Publishers and most bookstores. Check out The Leadership Challenge website at www.theleadershipchallenge.com

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